**Research and Discussion Forum: Effectiveness of sex education programs in the schools**

(20 points for your primary response and 4 points for replying to other at least two students)

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Learning Objectives for this assignment

1. Relate material in the textbook on adolescence and sexuality to a current controversy in our society.

2. Locate and evaluate the validity of information about sex education in the schools

3. Discuss the controversies and research with other students.

4. Demonstrate ability to distinguish between personal preferences, morality, and scientifically-derived information about a controversial topic

**The Assignment**

The U.S. teen pregnancy rate and sexually transmitted disease rate is much higher than any other industrialized nation, but the teen pregnancy rate has been declining for the past few years. Why do we have the highest rates, and why is the teen pregnancy rate declining? Is it because of the success of our sex education programs? Are teens abstaining from sex more often? Are teens using contraception more effectively?

There are two basic types of sex education programs. Abstinence-only programs teach the biology of reproduction and the symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s). They advocate total sexual abstinence as the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and STD’s. Comprehensive programs include these two components plus information about effectively using contraceptives to reduce the risk pregnancy and STD’s. They may also include discussions of sexuality issues between male and female students, characteristics healthy sexual relationships, and sexual dysfunction. Some will offer a health clinic with free consultation with a physician or nurse along with pregnancy tests, STD’s tests, and contraceptives. Some states require parental permission for such services, some do not. A variation on comprehensive sex education is called "abstinence-plus". These programs emphasize the desirability and benefits of abstinence either for now or until marriage but they also teach contraception and healthy sexual attitudes and relationships.

Sex Education programs vary around the U.S. in their components. Programs vary widely in their components. Some components are:

* No sex education in the schools; responsibility is solely on parents
* “Abstinence-only” programs teach reproductive biology but avoid teaching about contraceptives and risk-reducing approaches in sexual interaction. “Abstinence-based” programs emphasize abstinence until marriage as the preferred choice but also teach about contraceptives and STD preventive approaches. Comprehensive programs may be abstinence-based but include most or all of the following components as well.
* Reproductive biology is described and discussed including physiological functioning and anatomy
* Contraceptive methods are explained
* Contraceptive methods are demonstrated in class, handled by students.
* Abortion is described as a procedure; agencies that assist in obtaining an abortion are described and listed for students.
* Discussion of real life sexual attitudes, beliefs, behaviors in the students' age group
* Role playing risky situations involving sexuality to learn about safe behaviors and risky situations.
* Confidential appointments with an in-school health professional available for individual appointments at student's request to discuss questions, problems, get contraceptives, STD testing, pregnancy testing, pregnancy counseling, abortion referral.
* Parental permission may or may not be required for students to participate in the program.
* Duration: Some programs are one time presentations for a day or two, some are for a semester, some are for one year, some are for one semester each of several years, some beginning in grade school, some not until late high school.

**Audio & video resources describing some major issues in school-based sex education.**

1. "Teens and Sex": Katie Curic, then of NBC, discusses sexual behavior and attitudes with teenagers (2007). The original program was one hour, but this clip is only about 6 minutes.<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6872269/> (2007)

2. NPR All Things Considered: February 2, 2010: Abstinence-only sex education yields results

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123287773>

3. Sex Education in America: NPR audio and print:

(Print) Poll of parents preferences in abstinence vs. comprehensive sex education programs (2004):<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1622610>

(Audio) Comprehensive sex education program in Maine (2004):<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1624508>

(Audio) Abstinence-only sex education program in Dallas (2004):<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1646885>

* NPR Morning Edition June 5, 2008: Survey assesses teen risky behavior<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91181130> Includes sexual behavior, sex education in schools
* NPR June 6, 2010 All Things Considered: Proven Sex-Ed Programs Get A Boost From Obama<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127514185&sc=emaf>

**Your response in the Discussion Forum will earn up to 20 points for addressing the following points:**

1. What should the goals be for a sex education program? (2 points; 100 words)

2. How do you define "effective" for your program and how will you measure it? (2 points; 100 words)

3. What type of program do you think is most effective? Abstinence-only or comprehensive or some other version? What components would you included in your program to achieve you goals? (5 points)

4. Describe and cite at least one peer-reviewed source of evidence to support your type of program's effectiveness (EBSCO and ProQuest articles, web sites) (10 points; 200-300 words). You must demonstrate knowledge of the issues raised in the audio & video resources listed above by me AND you must locate a peer-reviewed journal research article to fulfill this. Describe how you decided that this resource was reliable (do not use "my instructor listed it; you must assess it yourself). APA format for citations is not required but you must include enough information that anyone (including me) can locate the resource and see for ourselves or you do not get credit for it. You earn up to 6 points for describing and citing a "valid, reliable" resource according to the way psychologists assess this. At this point in the course, you have seen in the textbook and assignments many examples of the way psychologists assess the reliability of information. Your score will reflect how well you apply psychologists' standards in your selection of a resource to cite here.

5. Describe your views and reactions to this topic and assignment. (1 points)

6. Respond to two other students' program descriptions in a substantive manner to earn two points each (4 points total). Respond to more if you wish, but you can only earn points for two responses.